

# Operationalizing the CONUS Base

## MISOC EFFECTS GROUP



BY MASTER SERGEANT JAMES MONROE

*ARSOF 2022*, the United States Army Special Operations Command's forward-looking "blueprint for change," envisions a complex, ill-structured operational environment with increasing fiscal and access constraints that potentially restricts our nation's ability to act allowing greater freedom of actions for our adversaries.<sup>1</sup> The challenge going forward is to build campaigns in these uncertain and politically sensitive environments where the threshold for deploying significant force structure is limited all the while achieving the national strategic end state. To better support our nation's options, *ARSOF 2022* calls for operationalization of the CONUS base, which means, "Our regionally expert forces provide continuous, proactive and responsive support to forward deployed forces."<sup>2</sup> This article explores the Military Information Support Operations Command's efforts to date to pull forward the future – today – by building interagency partnerships, developing operational concepts and generating talented leaders to provide adaptive, innovative and versatile influence capabilities to meet the challenges and opportunities in 2022 and beyond.

Since World War II, CONUS-based elements have provided support to forward-deployed elements. For example, the Office of Strategic Services Headquarters in Washington D.C., provided technical and planning support to teams scattered across the globe. Similarly, the Joint Staff Security Office was directly involved in strategic decep-

tion plans implemented in support of the theaters of operation. Since the late 1980s, deployed MISO forces received CONUS support under the concept of reachback to the multimedia production and the product-distribution system capabilities of the 3rd Military Information Support Battalion, research of civilian PhD Cultural Intelligence Analysts, and mission planning and logistical support from the deployed element's parent battalion. While reachback to CONUS support is not new, operationalization of the CONUS base differs substantially from these earlier efforts both in scope and in the formal institutionalization of the concept into the operating systems of USASOC and its subordinate units and commands. Expanding upon the concept of reachback, operationalizing the CONUS base seeks to bring to bear the capabilities and resources of the unified action partners — joint forces, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, as well as the private sector — in support of operational missions and to develop new capabilities, e.g. social media analytics. The efforts of the MISOC to operationalize the CONUS base are in direct support of the USASOC Commander's goal of "providing forces to ambassadors and geographic combatant commanders capable of navigating, operating and prevailing within the most complex and unpredictable of all environments – the human domain."<sup>3</sup>

Within the MISOC, the mechanism for implementing *ARSOF 2022* concepts,

including operationalizing the CONUS base, is the MISOC Effects Group. It is one of USASOC's four platforms to operationalize the CONUS base. The other USASOC platforms are U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School Institute for Military Support to Governance, the U.S. Army Special Forces Command's Office of Special Warfare and the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade's Civil Military Advisory Group.

The MEG is "a collaborative forum and working group — set in an interagency space in order to synchronize and integrate CONUS-based information related capabilities and influence entities and networks to provide innovative influence capabilities to warfighters globally."<sup>4</sup> The MEG was established in the fall of 2012 as an experimental test bed for developing approaches to implement the concepts of *ARSOF 2022*. The MEG was created within the conceptual frame of a Silicon Valley startup, with maximum flexibility to approach the problem set while attempting to minimize any disruption to the rest of the organization. It is chartered to experiment and develop innovations in support of the dynamic and complex *ARSOF 2022* environment without being tied to a formal organizational structure. Standing up the MEG as a separate entity allows the existing MISOC units and staff sections to remain focused on their current missions, while the MEG works to develop operational-

and strategic-level capabilities and concepts in support of *ARSOF 2022* that ultimately transition to the operating units of the MISOC. As the MISOC's understanding of the future operating environment develops, it is possible that the MEG will be formalized as a TDA entity of the MISOC via a force-design update. It is also possible that the organizational and integrating concepts of the MEG construct may be adopted by a higher echelon of command or another US-ASOC component subordinate command in order to aid in the building of campaigns to shape, prevent and win in uncertain and politically sensitive environments where the threshold for significant force structure is limited all the while achieving the required national-strategic end state.

Opinion Research; the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications; other ARSOF commands; Army Reserve MISO Groups; the Marine Corps Information Operations Command; and numerous other Department of Defense, academic and interorganizational participants. The purpose of the community of interest is to encourage collaboration and communication among the members and to seek ways to support the forward effort making the MEG a critical enabler in harnessing and operationalizing the CONUS base for joint SOF campaigns. The MEG aggressively partners with outside agencies for their unique expertise, such as the narrative research of the DARPA; the polling data of the INR-OPN; and the ideology research

usually a senior representative from one of the community of interest participants or a subject-matter expert who leads discussion in the respective area of expertise. Previous chairs have included Lt. Gen. Ken Tovo, at that time Commander of the Special Operations Command, Central Command, and Ambassador Alberto Fernandez, Coordinator for the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications. Recent notable sessions include the May 2, 2013 presentation by Dr. William Casebeer from DARPA on narrative construction and deconstruction, and the May 16, 2013 presentation by Dr. Erica Chenoweth from the University of Denver on her research into the efficacy of civil resistance.

Outside of the secure video teleconference, the community of interest main-

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The MEG staff currently consists of eight officers, including an Air Force Behavioral Scientist, two PSYOP NCOs and two civilian PhD cultural intelligence analysts. These personnel were handpicked by the MISOC commander for the special skill sets they possess, such as a demonstrated keen understanding of influence, unconventional warfare and foreign internal defense, revolution, social-movement theory or a grasp of social media and emerging communication technologies and media.

The MEG has put several key initiatives in motion — most notable is the Inform and Influence Community of Interest. Membership in the MEG community of interest includes representation from the theater special operations commands, which serve as points of entry to the supported geographic combatant commands; the Joint Staff; the U.S. Special Operations Command; the National Counterterrorism Center; the Department of State Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Office of

of the NCTC. In return, the community of interest gains an understanding of MISO missions and can coordinate through the MEG with the TSOCs for deployed MISO support to the members' own mission sets. It is important to note that the community of interest is not a hierarchy; rather, it is a network that the MEG facilitates. In addition, the community of interest is an informal entity, thus the concepts, work and information discussed must therefore offer a value-added benefit to the participants in order for members to want to continue and even increase participation.

Central to the Community of Interest activities is the secure video teleconference hosted by the MISOC every two weeks. During these one-hour MEG sessions, the community of interest receives presentations oriented around a predetermined theme and participants are encouraged to ask questions and even to challenge the material presented. Each session has a chair, usually the MISOC commander and a guest co-chair who is

tains contact and participates in episodic working groups, tackling special topics in greater depth than a one-hour MEG session can afford. An example of this relationship is the countering violent-extremist ideology workshop hosted by the MEG. During this workshop, members of the community of interest detailed their efforts, offered feedback and worked to achieve a consensus approach in this vital endeavor. Additionally, members of the community of interest participated in USASOC's Silent Quest 13-01 exercise and are anticipated to participate in Silent Quest 13-02, ensuring unified-action partner integration into these critical exercises.

In addition to building the community of interest, the MEG has begun development of Social Media Analytics Regional Teams. These teams, when fielded, are intended to provide the forward-deployed ARSOF elements a resource for understanding the social-media environment, from key-word mapping to trend monitoring and social network analysis.

The Social Media Analytics Regional Team concept is still in the nascent stages with the initial goal being the creation of a team within each Military Information Support Group, followed by the creation of a team within each regionally aligned Military Information Support Battalion. The final Social Media Analytics Regional Team configuration will be informed by lessons learned as the initial team is put into action. The MEG is currently collecting a suite of existing training programs, such as the Naval Postgraduate School's seminars on social network analysis and the Open Source Center's social-media training, which will provide the Social Media Analytics Regional Teams with an initial operating capability until a formal training pipeline can be developed in partnership with USAJFKSWCS. The approach to Social Media Analytics Regional Teams demonstrates a cornerstone of the MEG experiment: spinning off of concepts to the appropriate venue once sufficiently developed. At a future decision point, ownership of the Social Media Analytics Regional Team concept and the training requirements will be spun-off to a more appropriate agency, such as the 5th Battalion, USAJFKSWCS. The spin-off of concepts serves two critical functions. First, the concept will ultimately reside where it best fits. Second, spinning off developed concepts allows the MEG to stay on focus as an experimental think-tank rather than becoming an executing staff element.

It is critical to understand that while the CONUS base is being energized in support of the deployed mission, mission command of forward deployed ARSOF typically resides with the appropriate TSOC. Thus, while the MISOC may communicate informally with deployed ARSOF elements, any formal MISOC support — whether from organic resources or from the Community of Interest to a deployed element — must be coordinated and ultimately controlled through the TSOC assigned operational control over that element. A firm understanding of the difference between chains of command and lines of coordination or communication is necessary

so that the support provided by the CONUS base does not disrupt mission command. The MEG internalizes this command relationship in its charter by emphasizing that the MEG does not act independently of the geographic combatant commanders and the TSOCs; rather, the MEG works to support the objectives of the combatant commanders and U.S. ambassadors.<sup>5</sup>

Operationalization of the CONUS base represents a critical line of effort within the ARSOF 2022 concept. In a complex, uncertain environment, the ARSOF community must utilize every appropriate resource and capability resident in the CONUS base in support of operational missions. The MISOC, through the MEG, works continually to achieve this end. In the long term, operationalizing the CONUS base demands the MEG become the focal point for the integration and synchronization of an ARSOF approach to strategic- and operational-level influence efforts in support of geographic combatant commanders' objectives.<sup>6</sup> This requirement is reinforced by Lt. Gen. Charles Cleveland's guidance: "Today, the Army must consider the possibility that military success in modern 'wars among the people' will require ever increasing interdependence among the military services and inter-agency partners."<sup>7</sup> The MEG, through the community of interest, is how the MISOC will actualize this obligation. **SW**

*Master Sgt. James Monroe is the S3 at the Military Information Support Operations Command at Fort Bragg, N.C.*

## Notes

1. United States Army Special Operations Command, ARSOF 2022, (Fort Bragg, NC, USASOC, 2013), 4.
2. USASOC, ARSOF 2022, 17.
3. LTG Charles T. Cleveland and LTC Stuart L. Farris, "Toward Strategic Landpower," *Army* 63, no. 5 (2013): 22.
4. LTC Robert Cody, "MISOC Effects Group (MEG) Gen II," (Fort Bragg, NC; USASOC, 2013), slide presentation.
5. LTC Cody, "MISOC Effects Group (MEG) Gen II."
6. USASOC, ARSOF 2022, 21.
7. LTG Cleveland, "Toward Strategic Landpower," 21.

# MISOC EFFECTS GROUP (MEG) – GEN II CHARTER

## What it is:

The MISOC Effects Group is a collaborative forum/working group — set in an interagency space with the objective of connecting and harnessing CONUS-based influence entities/networks in support of the forward effort.

## What it is not:

- It is not meant or designed to act independent of GCCs/TSOCs.
- It is not a force allocation or resourcing board.

## What it will do:

- It will function as an enabler for the interagency / GCCs and TSOCs and paces off their OAAs.
- It will harness the intellectual/human capacity of CONUS-based Inform and Influence Activities and Information Related Capabilities.
- It will work in concert with a broad range of Joint and Interagency partners to support combatant commander and ambassador objectives.

## MEG Gen II enhances and enables USASOC Future Operational Concepts for 2022 and beyond:

- Integrates influence capabilities for CSC/CSU Operationalized CONUS based entities — U.S. Army Special Forces Command's Office of Special Warfare.
- Serves as a coordination point between TSOCs and MISTF 2022 Force Packages and the MISOC Global Web Initiative.
- Serves as a synchronization/coordination point between interagency / intergovernmental entities and the MISOC Tool Kit.
- Leads the MISOC CVE Ideology LOE — and augments MISTF 2022 Force Packages as required.

## End State:

The MEG is one of USASOC's platforms to operationalize the CONUS base — to increase the operational reach of the TSOCs and by extension the GCCs by better connecting and harnessing the CONUS strategic/operational level Inform and Influence interagency/intergovernmental entities to better support Interagency/GCC and TSOC OAAs in achieving psychological effects and behavior change in select foreign audiences in support of the U.S. National Security Strategy.